# Inspiring Capital?

# The recent future of Scottish Art

## Robin Baillie and Neil Mulholland

**Scottish Art since 1960**
**Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews**
Craig Richardson
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*In a discussion recorded over two sessions, Robin Baillie and Neil Mulholland address issues raised by Craig Richardson's recently published book 'Scottish Art since 1960', which describes its intention as:*

"Providing an analysis and including discussion (interviewing artists, curators and critics and accessing non-catalogued personal archives) towards a new chronology, Richardson here examines and proposes a sequence of precisely denoted 'exemplary' works which outlines a self-conscious definition of the interrogative term 'Scottish art.' Richardson addresses key areas of cultural politics and identity to illuminate the development of Scottish art, enhancing our understanding of the dynamics of art practice today."

**Neil Mulholland:** The introduction is something of a literature review with spoiler, it tells you more-or-less everything that's in the book. The sense of a polemic that's in the introduction, it's never really substantiated in a lot of cases.

**Robin Baillie:** Craig has an agenda which he sets out, but then he does a survey and tries to suffuse that agenda into it. The artists only come in as descriptive framing, you get these wee thumbnail sketches. I'm not saying they're totally off, that they're not without validity, but they're not an unpacking. They're not analytical deconstructions of what these people are doing.

**NM:** There are places where the book does achieve this. The section on Steven Campbell does this job well. Craig looks through work as a thing in itself, then looks at its reception and does it justice. There's a sense of this subject being taken as a case study and carefully built up.

**RB:** The thing about Campbell is there was international recognition of a kind for an individual doing a non-specifically 'Scottish' style. Campbell's difficult for Craig to write his bigger agenda to, because... maybe he doesn't like it aesthetically because it's figurative, it's expressive, but also because Campbell has to be placed to one side to allow the flow of neo-conceptualism to take place.

**NM:** Because it's one guy as well, as opposed to a group of people, a 'movement' is required.

**RB:** Although there was a group of them but no one's writing about them of course.

**NM:** There's more of a sense elsewhere in the book of people doing things collectively – in the discussion of the New 57 gallery, or of Transmission – there's a social network there, one that we don't get in the discussion of Campbell.

There are five chapters in the book. The introduction lays out what we're going to hear about: National Galleries of Scotland, Richard Demarco Gallery, The 57, Graham Murray Gallery, Fruitmarket, Third Eye, Transmission, Modern Institute. In terms of institutions, these are the narrow limits of the book's structure.

He starts in 1960 with the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (SNGMA) and laments that it never took the form that it might have. He describes its residency in Inverleith House and its move to the West End, but there's never any conclusion reached regarding why this entire episode might, ultimately, have any import. This is especially odd given that what sometimes ends up being, rightly, celebrated in the book is the value of independent curatorial activity. I wonder, why bother with the perceived 'centre'?

**RB:** What he doesn't say is what a national modern art institution should be doing. He criticises existing institutions for conservative bias, establishment bias, traditionalist bias, and possibly anti-Scottishness, but he doesn't actually map out a possible alternative programme. Maybe because that's a tendentious thing to do. The introduction describes an institutional structure that he can trace over time, through various galleries and their exhibitions.

**NM:** In scholastic terms, it's easier to map out this territory, because the SNGMA is still here, there are people you can speak to who were/are there and there's a good archive. In general, the bigger and older the institution the better the historical resources.

**RB:** He also lays out a chain of critical writing, and a chain of artists, for which he's relying on interviews from personal sources – "non-catalogued personal archives".

**NM:** On the one hand, he is quite heavily tied to institutions, and so to an (unspoken) institutional theory of art. It is a 'Police Force' institutionalism, more George Dickie than Arthur Danto. It's all about joining clubs. Yet there's another incongruous trope regarding landscape and northern-ness that requires a very different approach to this weak institutionalism. It comes across as volkish. It needs taken apart to avoid this, as a geopolitics or via cultural geography. This narrative reads differently, a simple, slightly misty-eyed, thesis that might work as speculative exhibition or as a catalogue text, but it doesn't fit well with the institutionalism. It's not historical.

**RB:** At the end, he invokes a communitarian art that returns to the land and the sea: "Communitarian cultural renewal might include the ongoing preoccupation with the values of the land and the seas in contrast with the resources of the cities." (p182)

**NM:** An Turas [*depicted, left and top*] is simply celebrated at the end of the first chapter, then it just ends..!

**RB:** It feels like the 'black square' of Scottish art.

**NM:** A hundred years late for the party.

[Malevich's *Black Square*, 1915, is considered one of the first abstract paintings.]

**RB:** Craig encourages us to look down this tunnel, and what we're looking at is the landscape and sea framed by the modernist black square. It's his perfect form because it sees Scotland through a modernist black box. So here we have it – he wants an art that has a nice neo-modernist frame, that shows us an eternal identity via Scottish land/seascape.

**NM:** There's a section later in the book that describes Dundee Contemporary Arts being built that explicitly fetishises it as a modernist gallery, by which I guess he means the structure rather than what it shows:

"the emphatically modernist new gallery Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA). DCA's tall exhibition spaces successively opened out and upwards in sequence, it's programme frequently presenting Scottish artists at key pre- and mid-career points and fully presented in comprehensive catalogues." (p165)

*Above and right:* An Turas, Ferry Terminal shelter, Tiree, opened 2003. A Scottish Arts Council funded collaboration between Sutherland Hussey Architects and artists Jake Harvey, Donald Urquhart, Glen Onwin, Sandra Kennedy.

He seems to be genuinely excited about the height of the ceilings and quality of the building, certainly more so than, say, what the Dundee artist-run space Generator had been doing since 1999 or what Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design graduates had achieved since the '60s – all of which he neglects to mention. This reads like it's cribbed from DCA's business plan, or a review that's actually a press release. DCA is a similar kind of building... it's very '90s. There's an aspiration through the text to reach this place, this is An Turas, a passage to Venice [Biennale], it's a goal, a destination. Does anyone buy this modernist myth of cultural progress? At the Heart of Darkness lies a vapour, not a jewel.

**RB:** He deploys a retrospective nationalism where Scots seem to him to possess a distinct identity and this identity needs to be seen, represented and recognised. What are the means he suggests to achieve this?

**NM:** There's an idea expressed in the first chapter, that the Scottish avant-garde all move to London and remain there in exile; these artists are explicitly framed as the avant-garde, a very limited number of artists.

**RB:** There's a Freudian-type desire present, a prodigal son parable, about how avant-gardeness can be achieved in Scottish art. That's the prodigality of it – the artists had to go away, when they go we lose them. Their Scottish nature is lost. So can we build a home for the avant garde in Scotland? The problem is that you can't – it isn't produced out of institutional structures.

**NM:** I don't really regard any of these artists to be avant-garde, there aren't any in the book, not in the true sense of the phrase. Between 1960-67, the time covered by the first chapter, the only artist that lived in Scotland mentioned is Joan Eardley. Very little is said of her work and nothing that's new.

**RB:** Eardley gets a mention because of her engagement with the land and the sea – that's Craig's thing about style, it must reference its idealised context. It's a domineering slant... always something about 'What is this nation?'

**NM:** This follows hot on the heels of a fairly lengthy discussion of Stanley Cursiter and the failure to

build the palace of art in the form of the failed Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. But there's no discussion of the specific nature of the collection in the SNGMA. It's a very particular collection; I want to know what the connection is between what was made in the art schools, shown in galleries here and what was in that collection. It's sketched out in the mention of the 'Modern Paintings from Scottish Homes' exhibition but there's no detail. It's handled much in the same way that Eardley is; mentioned but passed over. In contrast, we are introduced to Londoner William Turnbull's work in quite extensive detail. I don't feel that this helps us to understand what was (and wasn't) produced in Scotland. It's more a 'what might have been' had he remained here. There is lots written on Turnbull's work, not to mention Mark Boyle and Bruce McLean, who also dominate this chapter, but very little on what was made here, be it good or bad. Why bother going back over this well worn road?

**RB:** It reads like a survey, it has something to do with establishing a pantheon.

**NM:** He's chosen works and artists that he considers exemplars of 'Scottish art'. That's problematic on so many levels. These artists may well have been formative influences on his own practice, but to imagine that this alone makes them 'exemplary' is folly. Exemplars of what we might ask? Of their time and place? How can anyone be certain of this, that we have chosen the correct canon? We can't convincingly argue that some artists (those included) are any more exemplars of 'Scottish' art than others (those excluded). To do that we would need to have an ethnic, possibly essentialist, understanding of the 'Scottishness' of art, as if there were somehow degrees of 'Scottishness' by which we might evaluate matters. This act of territorialisation is Arnoldian, Leavisite even. It implies that the ethnic constructions of 'Scottishness' that we find in and around art, imaginaries that need to be deconstructed, are the method by which we should judge this art. The problem here, of course, is that we can make almost anything seem as if it is uniquely and essentially 'Scottish'. Hence Scottish Tories, Scottish Labour, Scottish Sun, Scotmid, dotSCOT, etc. Since 'Scottishness', like any other form of ethnic identity, is constantly contested, a moving target, we can't use it as a benchmark to evaluate anything.

**RB:** Try to make Ian Hamilton Findlay exemplary of anything! Findlay is the artist who should escape this tag most, because he denies many categories. He deals with Scottish identity in a weird modernist, minimalist, concrete way, in terms of the sailing boats, but not as romantic aspiration – that is projected onto neo-classicism. Findlay takes that Enlightenment universalism and he hammers it too. He shows the extreme authoritarian edge of it – order, discipline, militarism is in there as well. So the question then is complex, how do you explain that in terms of 'Scottishness'?

Steven Campbell, *Young Man Surrendering to the Landscape,* 1983

**NM:** I see very broad relations and connections between the work of Findlay, Boyle and McLean, but not with Turnbull. He just happens to be ethnically Scottish. Ultimately with Turnbull, Boyle and McLean, whatever we say about their work, I don't see how they can have made any real contribution to what this book is ostensibly about, namely the infrastructure of art in Scotland. They all live in London, so how could they possibly make a contribution to what goes on here on a day-to-day level? It's irrelevant whether they were born in Scotland or not, they don't have the right to vote in Scotland, they haven't been able to contribute to the geopolitics here... so why are they in this book at all?

**RB:** This has to do with the whole Union thing; the Union's in us all: England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. So historically maybe the Union is the biggest issue for Scotland. But is this a motivating force in Scottish art? He lassos Scottishness around people from totally different positions at different times. That Scottish lasso doesn't fit exactly.

**NM:** Whether that is a lasso or a noose, I don't know. It comes up a lot and it's very contradictory (as you'd expect). Fundamentally, it's not accompanied with an analysis of nationalism, of what nationhood is, what it was becoming, or of what constitutes a collective or ethnic identity. We are left to speculate whether or not we can categorise these individuals as 'Scottish', whether they themselves might accept this identification or, perhaps most importantly, whether thinking about such issues helps to better understand their work.

**RB:** That's what I mean; it's not rigorous. Alright, none of us are as rigorous as we'd like to be – but this loosens his terms and goes back to this idea: What is Craig's aim in talking about Scottish art? Is it to constitute it? That would be the aim of Hugh McDiarmid in the '30s, to actually say, 'We want to envision a kind of art we would put our name to'. That, in a way, is what he's doing again. He wants to envisage a 'Scottish Art' through writing up a recent history.

**NM:** If somebody moves to Scotland, then they gain an involvement in its life and culture. There were many artists present through the period 1960 to the present – the era that the book is supposed to engage with – who have legitimate place in a narrative regarding art in Scotland in this sense. Relatively few get a look in here, while a disproportionate number of ethnic Scots who left Scotland are celebrated as exemplars simply because they are 'Scottish'. Bruce McLean, for example. He may well have been an influence on artists here (and elsewhere), there are lots of other artists who might have been in this sense too, but the issue of his impact is irrespective of whether or not he's ethnically Scottish. Following the careers of, already well celebrated, 'successful' ethnic Scots is a wasted opportunity. The art history of 1960-67 in Scotland could have been the subject of some much needed discussion in this chapter. Even if we accept the idea is nothing was happening – that there was a blockage – then that's what this chapter should have concerned.

**RB:** He doesn't actually interrogate the issues around these periods, he assembles them by saying who he likes within them. It goes back to the chain: which artists can be linked together to form a narrative that brings us to Glasgow 1990? That's the point he needs to take us to above all else – he loses interest after that point altogether.

**NM:** The narrative falls off the cliff around about 1994, like Ernst Gombrich in 'The Story of Art' when he gets to Cubism. This early bit regarding 1960-67 really is a missed opportunity, it's somewhat uncharted. It's not very glamorous and little of it would be perceived to be 'successful' on such terms, nor might it really be worth 'celebrating' in the way that we are supposed to think, jingoistically, of a 'national' art, but that's exactly why it needs more work. It's a dirty art historical job but one that really needs to be done... There are points when it does happen, Glen Onwin's work is discussed at length, that's helpful.

However, even here, for me, Onwin's work opens an opportunity to discuss Environmental Art more widely, the fact that 'public art' was taught in the art schools around Scotland, not just at Glasgow School of Art. Muralism, environmental art, mixed media were all approaches taken that are part of a peculiar generalism found in old Scottish educational institutions. Artists were being trained to fulfill a social role. What that meant in the context of those courses was very broad because it went from stained glass to something more placement based. It really was a very broad church with a rich history to unpack. From reading the book, it feels almost as though that never existed here and we needed John Latham to come and make a point that there was such a practice. Again that's another missed opportunity to do some valuable research into what already existed in Scotland.

**RB:** He does ask for a Scottish art history to be written.

**NM:** So you've got to take it on as it is.

**RB:** We've got too many surveys already. Most Scottish art history is survey-based – Duncan Macmillan's and Murdo McDonald's books, for example. One exception is Tom Normand's 'The Modern Scot' written about the Scottish Renaissance.

**NM:** McDonald and Macmillan are at least finding something of value back there in the Scotland of the 1960s, whatever that might be. Clearly Craig doesn't value that work in the way they do – I'm not suggesting that he should. I'd at least like to see a considered re-evaluation of it, albeit that this might be a negative one. We don't have that. I'd like the received narrative to be taken to task.

There is a sense of what this could offer. He repeatedly uses the Americanism "uptown" to describe a recurring strategy of Keynesian culturalism in the '60s and '70s. The first chapter starts in 1960 because of the founding of SNGMA, while 1967 is the year of the Scottish Arts Council's (SAC) formation. This offers a useful frame of critical analysis, an insight into a managerialism that was hotly contested at the time (still is...). He dates this top-down management of the arts dating back to the time that SAC still ran its own galleries in Edinburgh and Glasgow. He, informatively, charts a move away from SAC programming and developing a curatorial remit towards the idea that its job was to support such activities...

Unfortunately, this line of enquiry is dropped in favour of triumphalism when the narrative reaches the '90s, despite the fact that such managerialism hasn't vanished (it has shape-shifted). The more the book unfolds, the institutional character of its bookends become more apparent – a telos of the 'talented bureaucrat' emerges in the increasingly managerial tone of the language. It gives the sense that this 'Scottish art' is a thing that desperately needs to be managed. It comes back to a weak institutional theory – it's the institutions that do this job, and they generally do it rather badly, at least at first. But there's a happy ending, all the bureaucratic hiccups are ironed out, and we all ultimately arrive 'uptown', in Venice.

**RB:** This is the story of his own career as a fellow traveller, by the artist himself – he does have this in his background.

**NM:** He actually writes about his own work here, in the third person.

**RB:** So we've someone writing art history at a professorial level who's moved to this point from being part of a circle of artists. Yet, he doesn't seem to empathise with the artist's view point in how he deals with them. He's interested more in, 'What do we need to create a *professionally* institutional art'; in who is going to help make the decisions that are going to cement Scottish art in its true place.

**NM:** There's a lot in here about policy and institutions, there's nothing wrong with that, it's partly an attempt to write a history of art as a history of institutions. Or it could have been were the narrative not so fixated with institutional (in)effectiveness. Where the story is, understandably, more positive, it concerns institutions that the author has been directly involved with, such as GSA (Glasgow School of Art) or Transmission, or at least has very close association with. So Modern Institute gets attention, DCA is praised, and a few obvious, older, independents are mentioned. This is a very selective account, and not one that helps us

understand the complexity and dynamics of the situation. There are just so many more models of formal and informal art institution in Scotland – operating at many different levels in many places, doing really incredible things – that simply don't register here. Can't have them all, sure, but without straying a little more off vested home turf we just can't see the bigger cyclical picture, institutionally speaking. Instead of rectifying this problem, the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) keeps popping in, playing the big bad wolf, even in the denouement, where Craig walks through there and imagines how it could have been... It all ends up reading as a very top-down account, very "uptown"...

**RB:** Maybe Craig feels more change is needed to represent a devolved Scotland, and as such he has a plan for the institutions of Scottish art?

**NM:** He talks, interestingly, about breaking NGS up and further devolving it to different regions in Scotland.

**RB:** His view may be that this kind of institution must work for the aim of constituting a 'Scottish Art'. And it must be *seen* to be working for this aim.

The date which doesn't appear in the book, which is like a ghost, is the date of the first independent Scottish government. We're still at a devolutionary stage and maybe he stopped writing a year or two ago, but there's this implication that the project is not fully delivered.

It's almost like he has a reality check – 'Well, we've got to Venice, we've got (had) the private gallery doggerfisher, but we know how flimsy it all is'. Of course, because it's not exactly what he's imagining – fantacising that an enlightened avant-garde would exist in a truly indepedent Scotland – it seems like merely a step on the way. However, sorry, you can't have an avant-garde national art! There's a conceptual flaw in that formulation.

**NM:** There's something similar in his demonstration of how the "Modern Institute introduced a level of hitherto marginalised market orientation of progressive and formally challenging artists." (p167) Here is a definitive correlation of marketisation and 'progress'. To be challenging doesn't actually mean being politically avant-garde, but it's very clear that they're supposedly the avant-garde's inheritors, the exemplars. It's a contradiction; they carry a culture of inheritance and entitlement while at the same time they are innovative and 'new'.

**RB:** It's the torch being passed on, and the ability to carry that torch. That is a progressivist view. How does he deal with that progressivism coming from outwith Scotland? I suppose you eventually get on to Kosuth, Weiner having been shown in Scotland.

**NM:** Craig mentions 'progressive' tendencies from the early '70s such as 'New Art' at the Hayward Gallery in London in '72, and 'Live in Your Head' in Switzerland in '69. This is just the tip of the iceberg, there were many more comparable shows that the Arts Council of Great Britain sponsored in the early '70s. They pushed post-minimalism, systems art, conceptual art, feminism and photoconceptualism. Such work had a powerful voice in *Studio International* (when Charles Harrison was involved with it, and later Richard Cork) so it wasn't by any means one show in 1972. It wasn't just this one beam of light nor did it all emanate from London. Significantly, key artists in British Conceptualism came from or worked in 'provincial' English towns, like Coventry. It was an international practice that was networked in a way comparable to that Craig describes happening much later in '90s Scotland. It often bypassed London. So, the idea that, in the early '70s, Scots needed to go to the Hayward in order to see the light in terms of the new work isn't entirely true. We need to remember, of course, that by no means was this kind of work dominant in the early '70s. In Scotland, the points of reference for the so-called avant-garde of the '60s and '70s, what at the time was called Scottish Realism, were from the 20th century or even from the mid-19th century, the original Realists, rather than any of this explosive networked conceptualism that was going on at the same time in England and elsewhere.

**RB:** I've heard Duncan Macmillan speak on Bellany, saying he's the culmination of a line right back to Raeburn – the use of colour, light, some kind of truthfulness, expressive authenticity; a classic universalist modernism. Craig isn't a universalist modernist (if he was he wouldn't be so attached to a nationalist agenda). It's more of a post-modern development he's pushing, where identity is more important than the internationalist values in modernism. He wants the recovery of identity as a goal.

**NM:** That issue of a vernacular reading of modernism is central here. Craig gets to it explicitly when he writes about how Sandy Moffat was interested in other manifestations of modernism in Europe, in Germany in particular. Moffat's connections were mainly German, so he's looking the other way from Art & Language; East to Europe rather than West to America.

**RB:** You could simply say the dominance of the Union at no time prevented international art being seen and understood in Scotland. There was no embargo to prevent Scots learning about it.

**NM:** Sure. This is where the exhibition the 'New Art' acts as a cipher, or caricature even. Craig consistently resorts to generalisms in the book, using stock phrases: "exhibitions such as", "artists such as", or "writers such as". It creates and fixes the idea of 'types', as if a very specific part can stand in for the whole. You can't pull this off. It's the same problem when writing about what went on in 1998 as in 1968. These exhibitions represent quite different positions on what was, at a given time and place, the 'new art'. The same goes for any artist we may mention... or any writer.

**RB:** "The avant garde premise of a sequence of Scottish artworks in the 1970s extended the term 'Scottish Art'." (p61) Was that their aim? Probably not. What is this term 'Scottish Art' and how did a sequence of avant-garde works extend it? Is it: 'We'll claim these avant garde art works for 'Scottish Art', and then bind them into its story'?

**NM:** That's just territorialisation isn't it? 'Scottish Art' in the New 57 Edinburgh in 1972, for example, meant something really very different from the later point at which Duncan Macmillan published *Scottish Art 1460-1990*. The territory is always shifting.

**RB:** You couldn't say that the Demarco Gallery had anything other than an internationalist perspective. Its based in Scotland, Edinburgh more so than anywhere else. It aspired to the freedom of avant-garde movement – transfer and cross-over. Granted, Demarco takes Beuys up to the Highlands. Beuys is probably more of a proto-Scottish nationalist than Demarco because Beuys is into German romanticism where Ossian, for example, has a massive presence.

**NM:** Demarco is transnationalist, although he's an advocate for Scotland, he is always wishing for a postnationalist context...

The show 'Strategy Get Arts' is discussed here in a way that doesn't really open it up. What was interesting about it, beyond the show itself, is that students who were there at the time, who went on to teach in Edinburgh or took over the committee of the New 57, started to make similar links in relation to what they would bring to Scotland.

So it was important in terms of another legacy; its direct impact on the grass-roots. It filtered down. Glen Onwin's teaching and work at New 57 was influenced by it. Alan Johnstone is mentioned in the book a lot at points, another artist with deep roots in German (and Japanese) post-minimalism. I want to know more about these connections, instead of a reiteration of what we know about the big benchmarks and creation myths.

**RB:** Even if he'd been more upfront about testing these people for their role in a national agenda, the survey takes over. He doesn't want to squeeze people too hard in case he finds that they're not that bothered about Scottishness. This tests his presumption that you can write a national art history in a country that is part of a bigger unit, whether that's Britain or Europe…


Ross Sinclair, *Real Life Huntly (surveyed from the Clashmach)*, 2011
photograph: Anna Vermehren

**NM:** Again, if you're going to do it then you need to take it warts 'n' all. You've got to write about things that you don't like, to be impartial about it. History doesn't unfold as we might like it to.

For example, there is a section of the book that follows the story of Scottish Arts Council grants in the '70s. It's similar to reading the New 57's invective mail at the time; it just as easily could be a letter written last week by Generator to Creative Scotland. It's interesting, to me at least, but the question is, how do you deal with this historically? In the book, it is all about not being able to get what you want, hardly a new experience for artists.

**RB:** Once again, the question behind all of these critiques is how would a truly Scottish institution operate? Maybe he needs to nail his colours to the mast and answer that. He doesn't evaluate Scottish government policies for funding the arts.

**NM:** There's nothing in here about that, little even about the changed conditions of post-devolution Scotland. He just doesn't get to devolution, it's too preoccupied with other, narrower artistic goals. The book really desperately needs to have an earlier cut off date on the masthead. 1995 is about as far as it gets really, albeit at times the year 2003 is mentioned. I don't get any sense of the Scotland of the late '90s, never mind its art. Where is 1999?

**RB:** He does talk about the struggle for devolution. He talks about the failed referendum in 1979.

**NM:** That's what's needed throughout. At the end you'd expect there to be a more politically engaged *coda*, something detailed about what's happened since devolution; it's been more than 10 years.

**RB:** This would actually put into place some of the things he is genuinely interested in, such as, what effect is Scotland's political state going to have on its art production, how is that going to be organised, is it going to be democratic, is it going to make reference to a bigger country next door or not? How are the cities going to play things in relation to the nation? But he doesn't follow through. Instead there is this almost still-born, coming-to-possession of Scottish art – i.e. that we got to Venice, we've got some superstars, we haven't quite got a contemporary art market but folk have started to talk about us. Then it just returns to aspiration that there will be something even more essential delivered.

It's a strange notion of transfer... It makes me think in the paradigm of the national pavilions. The nationalist view would be that our pavilion has to be better than others' pavilions. That Scottish art somehow should have the ability to be more truthful, authentic...

What's the difference between somebody who's been able to take a distanced cool overview and look at the evidence, as opposed to someone who's got a story from being involved, constituting some of these moments? He's no longer got that privilege of being detached, which may lead to an unevenness of judgement. Is it a history, or a critical overview?

**NM:** It's a question of focus, the method here expressly forces a focus on nodes rather than ties, on auteurs and objects rather than practices and relations. The '70s saw the formation of WASPS, which came with gallery spaces as well as studio space. There were numerous workshop-studio

spaces of that model, Sculpture Studios and Printmakers, that were and remain crucial. The only time that this network is mentioned is via discussion of £1512 by Alan Smith (1977). In this section, we hear about the closure of Edinburgh's Ceramic Workshop in 1974. This only happens because Craig thinks that this work is 'exemplary'. In reading this section, I kept asking, 'what about the Ceramic Workshop, what happened there?' It's here just as a foil, almost as if its *raison d'etre* were to close in order to enable the production of an iconic work. We learn nothing about how artists used that facility or how if formed part of a network of studio-galleries. In some ways it's not that different from what happens these days here. Artists are still showing in those kinds of workshop spaces, like Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Studio Warehouse or Rhubaba. It's the same situation. So why isn't that sort of studio-practice led activity more prominent in this narrative, why isn't it considered 'exemplary'?

The focus falls too heavily on the act of consumption, the packaged brand, the gallery. Talking about what the Scottish Arts Council or Scottish National Galleries were getting up to is almost pointless, and in some senses Craig has written, let's say proven, this: There was very little of interest happening there. So if that was the case, where were the interesting things happening? There's no way that it follows from this that there's nothing interesting going on, you've just got to dig deeper, or you've got to think about it in different terms, ask what was possible? I don't get that kind of sense of an infrastructure being established and negotiated, how difficult that was to put in place, of sensitivity to the terms of the time and thus of an understanding of the enormity of what was achieved.

Another example is Transmission gallery. It comes in really late in the book; it's positioned as if it were a separate entity when it was just a continuation of '68-style constitutionalism married to the exploitation of areas in post-industrial decline after the events of 1973. It comes from New 57 and WASPS taking the lead from Space and ACME in London and PS1 in New York – it's all there in 57's archive of letters. All of those activist artists of the '70s were talking to each other about how to get organised, how to take over former industrialised areas (Docklands, Hackney, Queens, Leith, Gallowgate) – networking wasn't just the business of conceptual artists or mail artists.

**RB:** But if Transmission leads to the Modern Institute, as it does in Craig's narrative – that three 'visionaries' come out of Transmission and go on to produce the Modern Institute – if that's the pattern, then his picture of the Transmission model is the one that should be advocated and re-established at all times, in all places. Or is it inevitable that the market supersedes? Maybe the issue at stake is marketability.

**NM:** In 'The Night Minds' chapter, looking at the early '80s, he discusses Transmission's early days. There's a quick roll call of what happened there that culminates in more lengthy discussion of Craig's collaboration with Douglas Gordon, Puberty Institution. Although they were both involved with Transmission, this is not explicitly to do with Transmission's work, it's just a collaboration, of which there were many. Here he's writing about something that he experienced himself but failing to describe it, he's just too close to it. In the end, it's about as far as you can get from an analysis of the early days of Transmission. There are so many other better studies of this period in Transmission – there are Transmission's autobiographies (both the published and the aborted version), Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt's MA Thesis, Sarah Lowndes' 'Social Sculpture', lots in magazines, etc. There's so much to draw on, a great archive, loads of punters to interview. Instead, we are ushered on very quickly to an inside reading of the exemplary performance group Puberty Institution.

Hardly any artists feature in this book when you consider it (try running a word cloud on the Google Books version). It's very limited. That's an issue. It's not that it should be completely inclusive, it can't be and there are greater problems afoot in setting out to attempt such a book. However, I think it's so far in the other direction as to be unconvincing.

**RB:** He's putting himself in the position of being a protagonist. From this position, authority seems to be attributed to identity. This may lead to the attempt to define a national identity in art and to select elements worthy of promotion.

**NM:** There's definitely an advocacy of ultimate legitimacy regarding who gets to choose, an acceptance of who more recently voices an acceptable authority upon what's produced and reproduced. This comes across most clearly in the triumphalism of the 'Routes to Venice' chapter.

**RB:** Which would explain that particular selection on who organised Venice, who was involved.

**NM:** The shameful fact that Scotland has resorted to sending national representatives to take part in a 19th century trade fair is openly celebrated – this is unadulterated Victorian-era nationalism. What he writes here is terrifying in its proud advocacy of cultural authoritarianism:

"The wisdom of the selector-curators was in the careful selection of these three artists at the prime of their experiment-driven practices; the artists were beyond juvenilia but alert to any new opportunities presented by each and every invitation." (p166)

This is the *Birmingham School of Business School* [The Fall, 1992], the corporate state par excellence. It's not meant to be a satire.

**RB:** Well it would have been a business plan, that was the kind of approach that SAC would have taken. I remember when Jason Bowman and Rachel Bradley curated the Venice Biennale Scotland Pavilion, it was very different of course, it was much more low-key. It wasn't artists who could be capitalised upon on as major names at that moment.

At the end of the book... he comes back to this thing: 'Who are the Scottish artists now?' But he doesn't get to right now, he tails off. Which is strange in a way – he gets to Simon Starling in Venice, 'Zenomap'... It's the idea of assuming a teleology for Scottish art. So you have to want Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland, if you want people who've achieved success – maybe on other terms. Does Venice participation mean we've got international recognition?

**NM:** Anyone can go to Venice, it's a case of getting the money together, negotiating a space, and representing your own interests. You have the Peckham Pavilion, Sheffield and Manchester, these cities and boroughs representing themselves independently of states or nations. You have nations that are not states, like Scotland, and you have many more nations that are states that aren't there because they can't afford it. So recognition is not something bestowed upon you, if you've got the money and the savvy, you can go, you can be there. Venice, as in its heyday, is just a market, it encourages pure opportunism – "take the piggies to market". The quasi-fascistic overtones of this economic Balkanisation requires more in-depth analysis – its not like qualifying for the World Cup!

**RB:** A lot of things he wants take you to the market ultimately. I think he gets confused by this himself. He's promoting 'Scottish Art'. He wants it to have a radical edge, achieve visibility in terms of the art world, and produce a body of critical writing. However, if these goals have been achieved, so to speak, there has been no political radicalism to underpin any artistic radicalism. Of course, the one thing that doesn't exist, that he wants, is a contemporary Scottish art market.

**NM:** If there was any home-grown market it has imploded in the last six months, it's totally fallen apart. ... (The book makes no mention of private galleries such as Ingelby, Sorcha Dallas or Mary Mary, despite the fact that they all were significant in the period it encompasses. Nor does it acknowledge the launch of many new artist-run initiatives from which some of the new private galleries sprung.) There are many ways of looking at this. One way is to fetishise taking 'Scottish art' to the international market. Another is to focus on how art in Scotland has internationalised or broadened itself in terms of who's here, who's come to Scotland. Both are present in the book, but far much more is made of just two private galleries – Modern Institute and doggerfisher – than of the non-commercial activity that so obviously outstrips the commercial sector in social, economic and artistic terms. The fact is, only a tiny minority of artists based in Scotland are, or have been, represented by the home-grown private sector since 1960; to say otherwise is either wishful thinking or strategically disingenuous. The public sector of the 1990s is also, at times, a fantasy funding land too in the book. Contrary to what is implied, very few artists were supported by art school teaching income in Scotland, fewer still by what Craig calls the "pre-eminence of applied research support in British art [...enabled by the] Arts and Humanities Research Board and improved levels of income from charities such as the Wellcome Trust." (p164)

**RB:** It's strange he refers to a Scots' 'diaspora'. Is he talking about Scots abroad (ethnic Scots who've moved elsewhere) or a Scottishness that's a kind of a network. I think it's the latter the book is about.

**NM:** There's long been an opportunistic Scots diaspora, as in the 'London-Scot', Scots who have gone away because they want to further their career. They go to a bigger pond. Others became diasporic because they had to leave – because of clearances or since they had no other economic opportunities. So the diaspora's are different depending on who we're talking about. If it's players in the art world, then it's generally opportunistic in more recent years. I wouldn't imagine an artist these days being forced out of Scotland in the way that they might have felt they were in the '40s or '50s. I can see why they would go, but not for quite the same reasons now.

**RB:** That would be MacDiarmid's point in the '30s: 'Why can't we sustain our own artists? Why can't we recognise the artists among us who are truly forward thinking and advanced?' Craig quotes MacDiarmid's book on William Johnstone, where MacDiarmid contrasts his friend's work with the Colourist school. Craig's ready to pick out those who oppose conservatism but then he's ambivalent about the break represented by Steven Campbell's work. Maybe this is because Craig romanticises the impact of certain styles as opposed to others.

**NM:** There was a confusion in a lot of art in the '90s between the ideologies of modernism – generally taken as a narrow seam of heroic European Constructivism – with a certain moderne look that people were beginning to revive not just in art, but in design also. People were taking to that just on formal terms, they liked the way it made them feel as consumers. There was never the delusion that this exercise in taste was a new avant-garde as the book seems to suggest. There was an embargo on claiming to be avant-garde from the end of the '70s, it became a joke ("You're not Sidney Taffler, I'm not Dirk Bogarde. I'm not very stylish and you're not avant garde", as Ian Dury put it.) Neomoderne was one of those well thumbed avant-garde grave stones, a mere signifier, a mainstream dressing up box, a text book lesson in how modernism failed (one we had already learned in the '80s) that took itself very seriously. This was just like any other revival – like the late '80s' '60s revival, or Biba reviving '30s fashion in the '60s – it was purely aesthetic, without any political edge. It keeps popping up, this constructivist corpse, as if it were avant-garde. It wasn't then and it isn't now.

*The full exchange is available online, at: www.variant.org.uk*